

(Fourth story of the series entitled "The City of Stories." Begun in the September number.)

BY FRANK M. BICKNELL.

THE end of the story of "The King's Castle in No Man's Land" brought

the Princess and the Third Son to the entrance of another street, which bore the curious title of "The Pumpkin Dwarf Street."

So they walked on at a moderate pace that they might read the story of

THE PUMPKIN DWARF.

THERE was once a poor laborer who lived in a wretched hut, standing in the midst of a barren field, where nothing green would grow. For feeding his family he depended solely on such paltry earnings as he could pick up by hiring himself out to some of the neighboring farmer folk; and when times were hard even this resource frequently failed him. One winter, when there was a great famine in the country, the poor man was driven to his wit's end to scrape together enough to keep his little ones from starving.

Now it chanced that his wife had a cousin, living in a village some miles distant, who was a rich man and could easily have helped them had he been so disposed. But, unhappily, he was as stingy as he was rich, and, moreover, he had taken offense at his kinswoman for having

bestowed her hand on a poor laborer. However, when worse came to worst the man was forced to seek the miserly cousin and beg his aid to keep his beloved children from dying of hunger.

The rich cousin received him in a surly fashion, and heard his pitiful tale with unsympathetic ears.

"Well," said he coldly, when the laborer had ended his story, "did I not foretell these miseries? What else could my cousin look for after having cast her lot with such as you—a luckless wight, with whom nothing ever can prosper? Ye may blame yourselves. Get you hence, and trouble me no more! It is late, and high time that all people were at home and asleep!"

These were harsh words, but the poor man was in desperate straits, so he stood his ground yet a little longer, begging and pleading so earnestly that a stone might almost have been melted to pity. And, finally, to get rid of him, the rich cousin went to his cupboard, and taking down a moldy loaf, threw it upon the table with a scowl, saying:

"Take this; and, since you are so helpless, come here on Monday week, and I will try and find work for you." Yet while he was making this offer he thought, within his heart, "In a week hence they all will be dead of hunger, and thus I shall be well rid of them."

But the poor laborer, returning more thanks for the wretched crust and for the grudging

promise than they deserved, took his leave with a somewhat lightened heart.

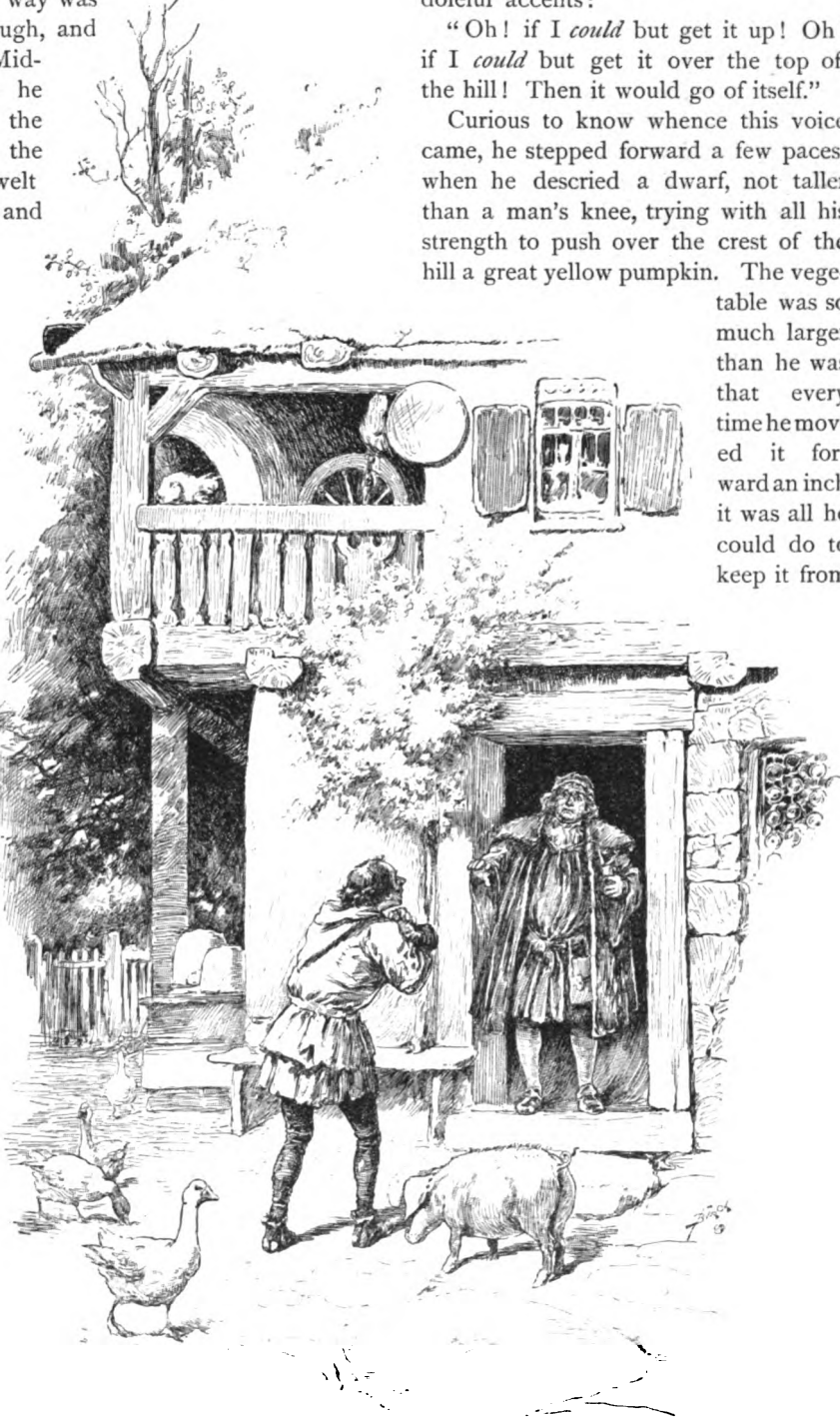
His homeward way was long, the road rough, and the hour late. Midnight struck as he passed through the village wherein the wealthy cousin dwelt. Though footsore and weary, he remembered the hungry mouths at home, and pushed bravely on until, by and by, he came to the last hill that lay between him and his poor hut. The steep and rugged road that he had now to traverse ran on through a thick wood for almost its entire length. As he toiled on toward the top of the hill, the moon, risen some hours before, began to shine down on his path; and as its cheerful rays chased away the gloom of the forest a weight suddenly seemed to be lifted from his breast, and he was filled with hope, as if a piece of good luck were about to befall him.

Presently, when he had nearly reached the summit, he heard a small voice crying out in doleful accents:

"Oh! if I *could* but get it up! Oh! if I *could* but get it over the top of the hill! Then it would go of itself."

Curious to know whence this voice came, he stepped forward a few paces, when he descried a dwarf, not taller than a man's knee, trying with all his strength to push over the crest of the hill a great yellow pumpkin. The vege-

table was so much larger than he was that every time he moved it forward an inch it was all he could do to keep it from



THE POOR LABORER BEGS AID OF THE RICH COUSIN.

rolling back two inches. Again and again he had failed, and now was well-nigh exhausted.

Seeing his plight, the laborer took pity on him, and, springing forward in the nick of time, by a vigorous push he sent it over the crest. Without a word of thanks, without even a look at his benefactor, the dwarf gathered his long beard under his arm, and, hopping nimbly on top of the moving pumpkin, he began to bowl merrily down the mountain-side, and soon was lost to view.

"So! so!" exclaimed the laborer; "there is one who believes that a good action is its own reward. At least he might have left a *thank you* behind him; that would cost nothing."

But he did the dwarf injustice, for when he reached the foot of the hill the little man was awaiting him, perched upon his pumpkin, and smiling benevolently in the moonlight.

"Laborer," said he, "thou hast a kind heart, and the service thou hast done me deserves some return. Ask whatsoever thou wilt, and thy wish shall be granted."

Now the poor laborer was not versed in the ways of the world, else he might have asked of the generous dwarf almost anything rather than what, in his simple-mindedness, he did ask for.

"Sir," said he, "next week I am promised work; give me but enough to keep me and mine from starving till the end of this week, and I shall be content."

"Go home," answered the dwarf, "draw a bucket of water from the well, and there shalt thou find all and more than thou desirest."

Having said these words, he struck his foot smartly upon the ground, and the pumpkin suddenly rolled away among the bushes, and, with its rider, disappeared from sight.

Then the laborer made haste home, and, going straight to the well, he let the bucket down into the water. Upon trying to draw it up again, he found it much heavier than it had ever been before; and when at last he succeeded in getting it to the top, what was his amazement to see that it was filled to the brim with shining gold pieces! He was not long in making known to his wife and children the wonderful news, and they all joined him in thanking Heaven for the help that had come to them in their sore need.

It was then too late to go to town to buy

food, but luckily there was no need of doing so. When the poor man took the moldy loaf from his pocket, behold! it had become as white, sweet, and fresh as on the day it was baked. Moreover, although not a large loaf to look at, it really was quite inexhaustible to cut from, and yielded a hearty supper for the whole family, without diminishing in the least.

From that night forth all went well with the laborer—a laborer no longer, for he was as rich now as formerly he had been poor. Not only was he able to live in comfort himself, but he also did much good among his poverty-stricken neighbors, and relieved a great deal of suffering by his many gifts of food and fuel.

Meanwhile, how fared it with the miserly cousin? Let us see. On the Saturday following the first visit of the poor man he received a second one from him.

"Here, cousin," said the former laborer, laying a gold piece on the table, "this is to pay for your bread, and many thanks to you."

The rich man was too much amazed even to pick up the coin. That a poor wretch who had come to him not seven days before in a starving condition should now be able to repay him for a worthless crust in this princely fashion was quite incomprehensible. He could only stare stupidly until, the other making a move to go, he managed to stammer:

"Hold, cousin! Not so fast. How came you by this money—you who only last week had such ado to keep soul and body together?"

As there seemed to be no good reason for concealment, the man related how he had helped a dwarf roll a pumpkin over the top of a hill, and had received a quantity of gold as a reward for the service.

After his kinsman had gone, the rich man could get no peace for thinking of what he had heard. Though already he had wealth enough and to spare, still his miserly soul was not content. All his greed and covetousness had been aroused, and would not let him rest until he had promised himself to set out upon the same road over which the poor man had traveled, in the hope that he, too, might have the luck to meet the pumpkin dwarf.

Accordingly, at sundown he saddled his horse and rode forth. It had become quite dark

when he began to ascend the mountain, and as he neared the top, where he expected to see the dwarf, his heart began to beat violently. "Suppose he should not be there!" thought he, divided between hope and fear.

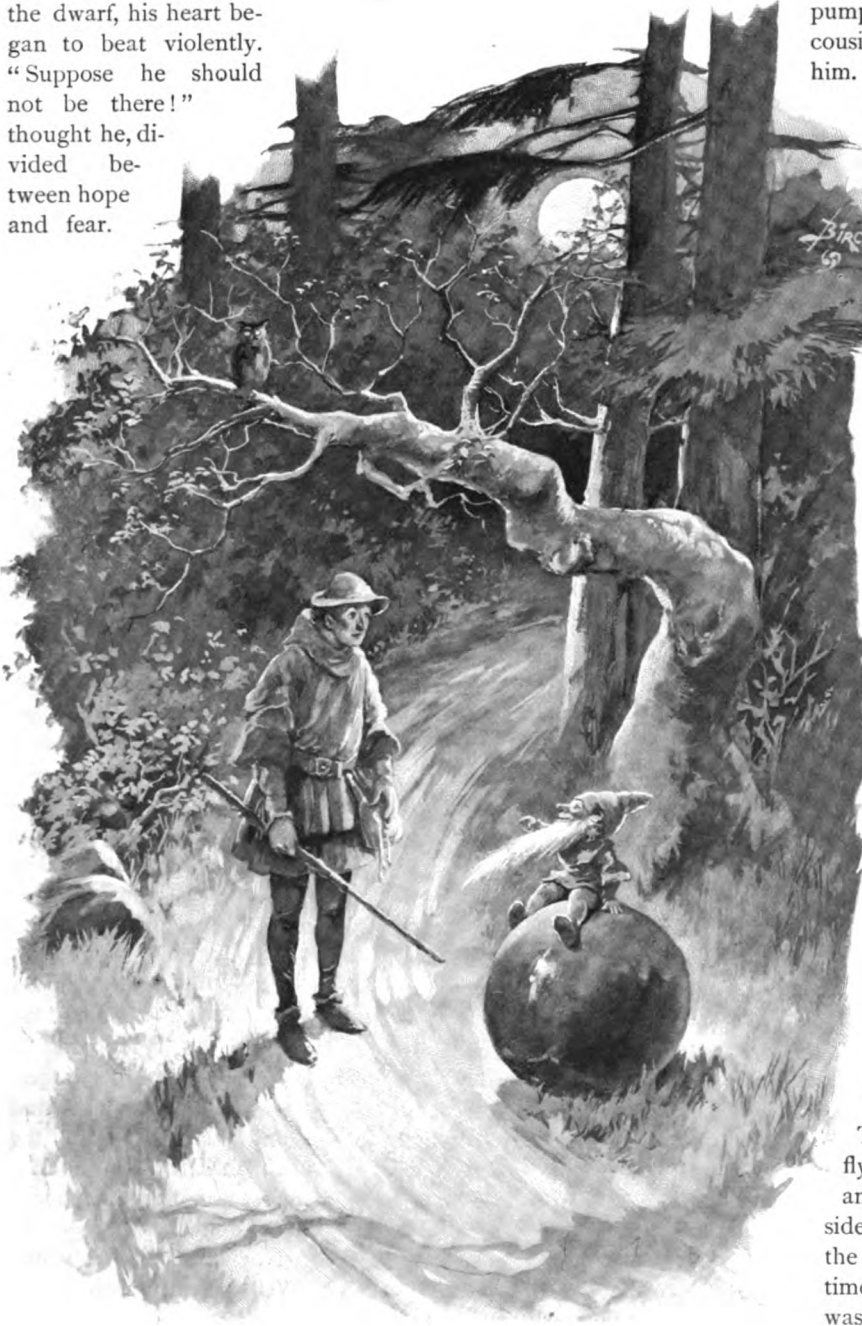
ing the summit of the mountain, to behold the quaint little man who was struggling with the pumpkin, just as his cousin had described him. Whether this was the same pumpkin the laborer had

seen nobody knows, but certainly it was the very same dwarf.

"Oh, if I could but get it over!" he was complaining. "Oh, if I could but get it over the crest of the hill! Then it would go of itself."

As he heard these words the rich man quickly dismounted from his steed and gave the pumpkin a rude shove with his foot.

Thereupon it went flying over the crest and down the other side so swiftly that the dwarf had not time to jump on, but was forced to run behind his queer vehicle as fast as his short legs



"THE LITTLE MAN WAS AWAITING HIM, PERCHED UPON HIS PUMPKIN BESIDE THE ROAD."

But in a few minutes all his doubts were set at rest, and great was his satisfaction, on reaching the summit of the mountain, to behold the quaint little man who was struggling with the pumpkin, just as his cousin had described him. Whether this was the same pumpkin the laborer had

came to the foot of the hill the dwarf had just overtaken his pumpkin, and was sitting upon it, panting and breathless after his chase.

words, for of a truth the adventure had not turned out as he had expected. He had counted upon being allowed to demand whatever he liked, and he had promised himself he would not be such a simpleton as the poor laborer had been.

But he had no choice; the dwarf had rolled himself out of sight the moment he had ceased speaking; and there was nothing for him to do but to make the best of his way back home, consoling him-

self as well as he could with the thought that a bucketful of gold, *and more*, was not by any means to be despised. And, too, he thought of a plan presently whereby he might get a great deal more out of the dwarf than his stupid kinsman had done. He proposed to

take the largest cask he could find and hang it from the chain in lieu of the bucket, thus securing a greater quantity of gold.

Now, how did this fine scheme succeed? Well, having with much trouble attached the cask and dropped it into the well, the rich man set to work to draw it up again. This was a hard task, and his back and arms ached well ere it was accomplished. But he toiled on, encouraged by the thought of the

"Thou art little used to aiding others and strangely unskilled from want of practice," said the manikin crossly. "However, none but fools look for down on the back of a hedgehog. Thou shalt have thy just reward. Get thee home, draw from the well a bucket of water, and that for which thy cousin asked, and more, shall be thine."

The rich man was rather abashed by these

"THE RICH MAN WAS QUITE AFRAID OF HIM, KNEE-HIGH THOUGH HE WAS."



great treasure he was about to possess. At last all of the chain was wound over the windlass and the cask-bucket was within his grasp. Trembling with eagerness he bent to seize it, when, to his bitter disappointment, he beheld simply a cask full of water — nothing more, nothing less.

The unhappy miser turned pale at this discovery. At first he was quite overwhelmed at the unexpected turn of affairs, but soon he brightened up a bit, for it occurred to him that he might yet succeed if he were to replace the original bucket. But it was quite the same as before. No matter how many times he lowered it, the bucket always came up holding water. At last, he flew into a rage at the dwarf, whom he called by all manner of abusive names.

In the midst of his tirade the little man suddenly appeared, seated on his pumpkin and rolling along at a furious rate. When he had arrived within a few paces of the spot where the rich man stood, he leaped lightly to the ground. It seemed as if he must have heard what had just been said about him, for his ears were red as if they were tingling smartly and his eyes flashed so fiercely that the miser was quite afraid of him, knee-high though he was.

"Miserable worm!" he cried in a voice shaking with passion, "what cause hast thou for complaint? If thou hadst not already enough and more, have I deceived thee?"

Have I made thee any promise that has not been fulfilled to the very letter? Thy cousin begged for enough to keep him and his from starving *until*

the week's end; hast thou not there that for which he asked, and even more?"

The dwarf pointed toward the caskful of water as he spoke, and the miser started as he realized the significance of his words. He could not but admit that he had got exactly what his cousin had asked for. The only difference in the two cases was that the poor man had met the dwarf early on Sunday morning, whereas he had met him late on Saturday evening; and, as he had taken supper before starting out, a glass of water certainly was enough for the brief remainder of the week, scarcely a quarter of an hour of which was yet to pass.

"Thy cousin served me from goodness of heart," continued the dwarf, "but thou hast done so from a base desire to increase thine own gains. For thy many iniquities I bestow on thee, from this day forth, the ill-luck that formerly attended thy cousin, while for him shall be the prosperity all and more than that which hitherto has waited undeserved on thee."

Having pronounced these fateful words the dwarf vaulted into his seat on the pumpkin and disappeared like a flash, leaving the avaricious cousin in no very pleasant state of mind.

Both the curse and the blessing of the little man were carried out to the letter, and thenceforth the once wealthy cousin grew poorer and poorer, so that except for the kindness of his cousin, he would have been obliged to beg his bread from door to door. But the other lived a long and happy life, and was always most fortunate in all that he undertook.

